

News Release



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Media Contacts:

Steve McDonald

Utah Department of Health

801-538-7099

Larry Lewis

Utah Department of Agriculture and Food

801-538-7104

Utah Officials Unveil Avian and Pandemic Influenza Response Plans

(Salt Lake City, UT) — Utah officials today unveiled a plan for responding to avian influenza in animals, and a plan for responding to an influenza pandemic, a worldwide outbreak of a lethal strain of influenza in humans. Officials also emphasized personal preparedness as a critical factor in preventing the spread of influenza.

“We don’t know if the bird flu will ever come to Utah. What we do know is that by planning and preparing for such threats we can save lives,” said Governor Jon M. Huntsman Jr.

The Utah Department of Health (UDOH) and the Utah Department of Agriculture and Food (UDAF) have each developed response plans that spell out what Utah is doing to prepare for the possible arrival of avian influenza in the United States and to reduce the spread of influenza.

The UDOH plan includes details such as:

- Doing surveillance and laboratory testing to watch for a pandemic-causing virus
- Tracking an outbreak and limiting the spread of the virus
- Sharing accurate information with other agencies, doctors and health care providers in a timely manner
- Distributing vaccine when it becomes available
- Educating Utahns on how to protect themselves
- Tracking the impact of a pandemic on the health care system such as the availability of hospital beds

Page 2 of 2 - Utah Officials Unveil Avian and Pandemic Influenza Response Plans

“We’ve been working on our plan for over a year and now we’ll use the national plan to update and expand our planning and preparation,” said Dr. David N. Sundwall, Executive Director, UDOH. “While, no one is fully prepared for a pandemic, we will continually work to update, test and refine our plans in coordination with local, state and national partners.”

The plan prepared by the UDAF focuses on how to prevent avian influenza from entering Utah. “Our Avian Influenza Surveillance and Response Plan emphasizes a monitoring system that requires health certificates be issued for every domestic bird brought into the state,” said Leonard Blackham, Commissioner, UDAF. “The plan also includes mandatory testing of sample birds at commercial poultry farms on a regular basis.”

Currently, there is no influenza pandemic. An influenza pandemic occurs when a new influenza virus emerges for which there is little or no immunity in humans. The virus must also be able to infect humans, be easily spread from person to person and be lethal in order for a pandemic to occur. It is impossible to predict whether or not the H5N1 influenza strain (avian influenza) will be the source of the next influenza pandemic.

State officials also remind Utahns to prepare for the regular upcoming influenza season, which is different than a pandemic. Getting the flu vaccine, staying home when you are sick, and respiratory etiquette are all effective ways to limit the spread of influenza.

For information about where to get a flu shot in Utah, go to www.health.utah.gov and click on the Flu Vaccine Locator icon.

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